Frederick Sommer

THE POETIC LOGIC OF ART AND AESTHETICS

in collaboration with
Stephen Aldrich

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Words represent images:
nothing can be said for which there is no image.

Linkages between images exist a priori
and are the logic of display.
Linkages between words are the logic of grammar.

Images can be named; linkages can only be displayed.
Images and their linkages are states of affairs.
Words and their linkages are propositions.

Words occupy language structure as display of grammar:
what can be said can be seen as represented image.

Position is the prime element of form and from position
are derived all aspects of structure and form.

Elegance of form is the product of elegance of choice
within specific limitations.

Quantitative and qualitative choice of positions in space
and choice of occupiers for those positions
define the logic of form.

Position and occupier build structure and content.
Structure and content together constitute form.

In a generalized condition of space,
the sum of all occupiable positions
is the potential for creation.

Structure is a set of positions in space,
and content is a corresponding set of elements
which occupy the positions of that structure.

Our fundamental empathy is to the structure that content reveals.

The quality of content enhances its capacity to articulate structure.
Quality is adequate correspondence between structure and content.

Effectively positioned occupiers are images to which empathy
can be given. As image, content and structure are one.

In dance, as well as in paintings, drawings or musical scores, empathy is given to the gravity-related distribution of leverages across the visual field.

A dancer's elegant articulation of structure is display of inventive consent to gravity which mirrors our own need to honor gravity on all occasions.

Equilibrium is the legato of positional linkages within images.

Empathy is given to occupier: the dancer in transit from position to position within the dance as structure.

Gravity is the cohesion of matter as well as the cohesion of our empathy to structure within images.

Whatness is concerned with content.
In the solemnity of every hour life returns.

Whereness is concerned with linkages.
The legato of one squirrel holds a forest together.

art: feeling

feeling: reason

reason: induction

induction: poetic logic

poetic logic: deduction

deduction: symbolic logic

symbolic logic: reality

reality: science

As reasoning from display,
the intuitions of art and science
are noble conditions of technique.

Life is the most durable fiction that matter has yet come up with
and art is the structure of matter as life's most durable fiction.

Aesthetics celebrates art as the poetic logic of form.

Poetic logic is the sensuous apprehension of what we
do not yet understand in the presence of reality.

Poetic logic had to invent art to understand nature
as the positional growth of structure
within the matrix that is life.

We are the ones who put life into stones and pebbles.
When feeling is lucid, structure is art.

FREDERICK SOMMER

WORDS SPOKEN IN MEMORY OF RICHARD NICKEL AT A GATHERING OF HIS FRIENDS

GLESSNER HOUSE, CHICAGO

JUNE 21, 1972

I know not that God washes His hands
without sharing the harvest
He is not grateful for the silence
that shields us among friends
Man buys what he destroys

Give us then O Lord
a welcome in a greeting
offered without water

We are here today because of friendship; because of our friendship for Richard Nickel, and out of respect for his friendship to all conditions. Friendship is the condition of linkages to bonds that perceive and give. To make oneself available to what things could become, to make of them more than just a potential, is creativity in the finest sense, and it is only through creativity that any bonds are possible. Awareness of what others give is the coherent basis for life, and Richard Nickel was supremely aware of what could be supported in other's gifts.

Richard Nickel's friendship to all conditions was friendship in the widest connotation of social contract as culture. We can see now in retrospect that it was not difficult for Richard to be attracted to the invitation that Louis Sullivan holds out to anyone who wants to accept the consequences of a dream. Sullivan laid down the binding premise that the presence of facts is evocative of what can be done, and of what cannot be done.

Nourishment is to live things that are unsayable, that cannot be formulated. This is awareness other than by force of will. If this is what is in store for us, it will not be uninteresting. I say this not as a voyeur but as one whose empathy is to the cohesion of the voyage. I believe the sign is displayed in fragments already on the scene, but the picture has to be put together. The problem of modern man isn't to escape from one ideology to another, nor to escape from one formulation to find another; our problem is to live in the presence and in the attributes of reality. Then we will be able to put the picture together. This picture can only be the outcome of all the empathy given to many things observed in common. When many things are observed in common by the many who constitute a society, we will have reached a condition worth celebrating.

All mischievous smiles are honeymoons
What are small conspiracies but the binding of hearts

Leaves exchanging confidences
In the audible tapestry of my heart

Blame not the blamed
Quarreling is the uncorking of a good wish

Enthusiasm is the duty of understanding
Before the night fatal to remembrance

A tiny squirrel leaps in the sign of perfection
and the weight of its shyness vanishes

When cornets fresh in fragrant flowers
sometimes hide their eyes and wail
then patient will chide the child
and death shall lie as an Indian's boy
will dream of monsters within the hour

From jest to sport of another sort
this is the shadow a knave could flower

Man is wonderful no one has ever found out
what he's good for

In empathy we give of our feelings
in sympathy we know that we are late

When the single masterpiece is struck down, the act is attributed to a madman, but when the coherence of an entire society is vandalized, the destruction is viewed with proud arrogance as evidence of progress. The single destructive act comes as a shock, but anonymous insanity is unseen and unfelt. When forests fall, or millions die in ravaged landscapes, too few will see that this also is madness.

And when a remarkable individual, who is also our friend, is struck down, we are stunned. But will we see that he was fighting for the coherence of a society as a safe harbor for individual creative acts?

As a photographer, Richard Nickel was an imagist of art and of architecture, and as our friend, he gave out of abundance to each of us and to all conditions.

Louis Sullivan wrote in a letter to Walt Whitman:

"To a man who can resolve himself into subtle union with nature and humanity as you have done, who can blend the soul harmoniously with materials, who sees good in all and overflows in sympathy towards all things, enfolding them with his spirit; to such a man I joyfully give the name of poet . . . the most precious of all names."